

Sammy's Autograph Book

Sammy celebrated his 10th birthday party last week. One of his birthday presents was a small-size autograph book with 120 blank pages. "I'm going to fill up this entire book with autographs," Sammy said to himself as he paged thru the blank pages.

Sammy lived in a small town far from any big city. Famous people don't often visit small towns. For a brief moment Sammy thought that he might not be able to fill up his autograph book with autographs. Then he slid the autograph book into his backpack and started walking to school.

Along the way to his school he passed a firehouse. The new firefighter, Melissa, was outside, wrench in hand, fixing the fire engine. Opening the autograph book to its first page, Sammy pushed it in Melissa's direction. "Can you please sign my autograph book?" he asked politely. Melissa looked a bit surprised. "But I'm not famous," she started to explain. Sammy thought for a moment. "Do you save lives?" he asked. "Yes, I do," Melissa replied. "Well sign right there," Sammy said.

As he left the firehouse, Sammy knew that it wasn't going to be difficult to fill up his autograph book.

During lunchtime, at school, Sammy walked over to Judi, the assistant kindergarten teacher who had been teaching for more than 30 years. Judi was a legend at the school. She played guitar with her students, organized class performances and started a vegetable garden outside the door of the kindergarten classroom. "I'd like you to sign my autograph book," Sammy said with a smile as he pushed the book in her direction. "But I'm not famous, and I don't even have a college education," Judi replied. After a short pause, Sammy said, "How many students have you taught in 30 years, a little or a lot?" "A lot," Judi replied. "And do some of those students come back to thank you many years later?" "Well, yes they do," Judi said. "Then sign right here."

After school Sammy went to play basketball across the street in his neighbor's driveway. His neighbor, Alex, let all the kids in the neighborhood play basketball in his driveway. Alex loved dogs and once a week he took two of his most adorable dogs to the retirement home so that people who needed to be with pets could be with pets. "I'd like your autograph," Sammy said to Alex. "But I'm not famous," Alex started to say. "Do you let all the kids in the neighborhood play basketball in your driveway?" Alex asked.

"Yes, but..." And do you take adorable dogs to the retirement home? "Yes, but..." "Sign right here."

After his first day of collecting autographs, Sammy looked at the many empty pages that remained. How in the world could he fill up the entire autograph book when he lived in such a small town? All of a sudden an idea popped into his head.

He would go back to the people who signed his autograph books and ask each of them to write a few sentences about one of their heroes. When he approached Melissa, the firefighter, he could see that she had had a tough day. She looked tired. Sammy realized this would not be a good time to ask her to write about one of her heroes.

So at lunch the next day he asked Judi, the assistant kindergarten teacher, if she could write a few sentences about one of her heroes. He was surprised when she wrote a few sentences about Dr. Seuss. "Why is Dr. Seuss a hero?" Sammy wondered out loud. "Go back and read his stories and you'll understand why," Judi said. Sammy didn't get it, but if there were anyone in the school who knew what was important, it was Judi the assistant kindergarten teacher. As he was leaving, he called back over his shoulder, "By the way, what's your favorite Dr. Seuss story?" "I like "Sneetches on the Beaches," Judi said with a smile. "It's by far his best story."

Sammy then asked Alex, his neighbor, to write a few sentences about one of his heroes. Alex had to think a while before writing his sentences. His sentences included no one's name. "Heroes are the people who can see a better world just around the corner," Sammy read as he rounded the corner on his way home.

The next day Sammy stopped at the firehouse on his way to school. Melissa looked strong and energetic in the morning. When he explained that he wanted her to write about one of her heroes, Melissa thought for a moment and then scribbled a few words. Sammy was late to school so he didn't get a chance to see what she wrote. He was so curious to read it, though. In class, when he was supposed to be doing something else, he took a quick glance. "I am my own hero," were the only words on the page.

His teacher, who saw that Sammy was distracted for a moment, said "Sammy, I want you to focus your attention on learning and stop being so distracted. How can you possibly learn anything if you're not paying attention?"

Sammy looked up surprised. "Oh, is that your autograph book you have with you?" his teacher asked. "You've been teaching our class so much with that book. Learning can be found anywhere you look for it. The world is full of discoveries if you are an explorer."

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Phil Shapiro works at the Takoma Park Maryland Library. His children stories on the web are popular with children in several different countries around the world. He prides himself on being one of the best known children story writers that nobody has ever heard of.



Photo of Phil – age 10 – when he received a blank autograph book as a birthday present.

